

NEW POLICY OF THE COMMONS

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and he has represented the county at Westminster * full often time' as 'Knight of the Shire/ It was probably such men, even more than the knights trained to arms, who felt that the interest of the Commons was opposed to that of the Lords. The Knight and the Franklin are the two principal types of men representing the counties in the Lower House. As the yeomen also took part in the elections, their wishes probably influenced the policy of the members elected. The interests of the yeomen must have been in some cases those of the peasantry, in others those of the gentlemen, but in none those of the Lords.

During the minority of Eichard the Second, the knights of the shire entered on a consistent policy of interference with the administration. Almost every Parliament they turned out ministers or elected fresh councils of state. Sometimes, as soon as they had gone home, their wise reforms were rudely set aside by John of Gaunt or other nobles ; sometimes the persons they themselves had chosen proved untrustworthy or incapable. But they insisted, Parliament after Parliament, 'on taking the affairs of the nation into their own hands and arranging for the next year's government. This resolute line of policy was a new development. Isolated instances of such interference by the Commons had occurred in 1341 and 1371, but the action had not been followed up, and Edward the Third had generally chosen his own ministers without question. In the Bolls of Parliament for the 'fifties and 'sixties, there is no mention of proceedings for the appointment and reappointment of councils and officers of state, such as occur so very frequently between 1377 and 1381. The new policy probably originated from a sense of power discovered by the striking events of the Good Parliament, which appear to have greatly impressed contemporaries. It was also due to the opportunity offered by the King's minority. If Eichard's youth was the opening for the ambition of the Lords, it was also the opening for the claims of the Commons. In later years, when Eichard, having come of age, more and more took power into his own hands, the Commons interfered less and less in the choice of his ministers. A third and no less important cause is to

be found in the ill-success **of** the war.